

RETURN-TO-OWNER SECURITY LOCKOUT FOR
A PORTABLE ELECTRONIC DEVICE

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RETURN-TO-OWNER SECURITY LOCKOUT FOR
A PORTABLE ELECTRONIC DEVICE

TECHNICAL FIELD

The invention relates to electronic devices. In particular, the invention relates
5 to portable electronic devices, especially those having an integrated display interface.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

Portable electronic devices including, but not limited to, notebook and laptop
computers, hand-held computers and personal digital assistants (PDAs), digital still
cameras, video cameras, and cellular telephones are popular, widely available, and in
10 widespread use. Some portable devices, such as digital cameras and PDAs, would be
of little or no value if it were not for their portability. For other portable devices,
marketability and popularity are due in large part to the freedom to transport and use
these devices just about anywhere.

At present, portable electronic devices account for a sizable portion of the
15 consumer electronic market. Expected improvements in battery technology and in the
power consumption of electronics used in portable devices concomitant with a
continued decrease in component size and unit cost portend a continued growth in the
portable electronic device market for the foreseeable future.

Although prices for many portable electronic devices have historically
20 decreased as a function of time from device introduction, portable electronic devices
are often still relatively expensive. Retail prices for individual portable electronic
devices typically range from several hundred to several thousand dollars. A digital
camera retailing for around one thousand dollars, for example, still represents a
significant investment for the average consumer.

25 Unfortunately, portability is both a blessing and a curse for portable electronic
devices. Portability makes the device attractive and/or useful to the user or owner.
On the other hand, portability makes keeping track of the device more difficult. In
short, portable electronic devices are prone to being lost or stolen. Given the not-so-

insignificant cost of many portable electronic devices, security features for these devices are of great interest and potential value.

In general, security features used with portable electronic devices seek to render the devices less attractive to or even useless to all but an authorized user (e.g.,
5 an owner). In most cases the security feature simply attempts to keep an unauthorized user from using the device. If the device will not function for an unauthorized user, the device will have no value.

Conventional portable electronic device security features range from simple, externally applied devices, such as locks or alarms, to sophisticated built-in functions
10 of the electronic device. Among the built-in features available on such devices, such as laptop computers, are password-based security lockout functions that disable the device unless a valid password is entered. Without the password, the device is rendered non-operational, thereby greatly decreasing its value to a would-be thief. The lockout feature also reduces the value of the device to an otherwise honest
15 individual that happens to find a lost device.

Unfortunately, while conventional security features may successfully deny use of the device to unauthorized users, these features generally fail to address the related problem of reuniting the lost or stolen device and its rightful owner. Since many portable electronic devices are relatively expensive, most owners greatly appreciate
20 the return of a lost or stolen device. However, simply denying use of the device does little to facilitate its return.

Accordingly, it would be nice to have a security lockout feature for portable electronic devices that both disabled the device to deny use to an unauthorized user and provided a way to return the device to its rightful owner. Such a security lockout
25 feature would fulfill a long-felt need in the area of portable electronic devices.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

The present invention is a method of return-to-owner security lockout for an electronic device and a portable electronic device having return-to-owner security lockout. The return-to-owner security lockout according to the present invention
30 comprises displaying owner information when a security lockout disables the